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AUTHOR Yamauchi, Lois A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the values, expectations, and experiences in school among residents of the island of Moloka'i (Hawaii). Using semi-structured interviews, researchers sought to establish whether native Hawaiians' values and experiences in school were distinguishable from other Moloka'i community members, including those of school personnel. As a group, native Hawaiians are among the lowest-scoring minorities in the nation on standardized achievement tests, and research suggests that misunderstanding of school activities and resistance to its values, especially as they are in conflict with home values, are common. Participants were 12 native Hawaiians and 18 other residents from varied ethnic groups, aged 20-81. Interviews focused on personal values, observed values of others, cultural compatibility of schooling, specifically Hawaiian aspects of the community or schools, success or failure of teachers, and island lifestyle. Analysis compared these variables across demographic variables. Results suggest possible existence of three somewhat distinct cultural spheres: local Moloka'i community and its shared culture; the culture of the school community; and the more Hawaiian home culture. While some interviewees felt school was competitive, none attributed academic failure to the institution itself, but to families and student effort. Subjects also perceived ethnic differences in educational attitudes. (Contains 23 references.) (MSE)

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Native Hawaiians on Moloka'i:

Culture, Community, and Schooling

Lois A. Yamauchi, William L. Greene, Katherine T. Ratliffe, & Andrea Ceppi

University of Hawai'i

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Address correspondence to:

Lois A. Yamauchi
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Hawai'i
1776 University Avenue
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
email: yamauchi@Hawaii.edu
phone: (808)956-4294 fax: (808)956-6615

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Abstract

This study examined the values, expectations, and experiences in school among residents on the island of Moloka'i, in the State of Hawai'i. Using semi-structured interviews, we sought to establish whether Native Hawaiians' values and experiences in school were discernible from other Moloka'i community members, including those of school personnel. As a group, Native Hawaiians are among the lowest scoring minorities in the nation on standardized achievement tests (e.g., Gallimore, Tharp, Sloat, Klein, & Troy, 1982). Educational researchers have noted that Native Hawaiians and other minority students often misunderstand the activities of school, and come to resist the values of the institution, especially as they are in conflict with the expectations and values of the home (e.g., D'Amato, 1988; Ogbu, 1991). Analysis of the interview data indicated the possible existence of three cultural spheres. At the broadest and most common level, was the culture of the local Moloka'i community. The other two cultural spheres were the culture of school and a "Hawaiian" home culture. We discuss the interaction of these cultural spheres as they relate to cultural compatibility of schooling on the island.

Native Hawaiians on Moloka'i:

Culture, Community, and Schooling

This study examined the values, expectations, and experiences in school among residents on the island of Moloka'i, including Native Hawaiians, community members from other ethnic groups, educators, and non-educators. Using semi-structured interviews, we sought to establish whether Hawaiians' values and experiences in school were discernible from other Moloka'i community members, including those of school personnel.

As a group, Native Hawaiians are among the lowest scoring minorities in the nation on standardized achievement tests (Gallimore, Tharp, Sloat, Klein, & Troy, 1982; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Educational researchers have noted that Native Hawaiians and other minority students often misunderstand the activities of school, and come to resist the values of the institution, especially as they are in conflict with the expectations and values of the home (D'Amato, 1988; Ogbu, 1991; Philips, 1983; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). This approach to minority education considers the school as a culture in itself, with it own inherent beliefs, values, and expectations for behavior--most often adopted from the dominant European-American society (Rogoff, 1990; Tharp, 1989; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994). Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) comment on the need to understand how the community influences individual-level psychological functioning and to give more attention to cross-cultural research in this area.

Moloka'i and Its Schools

The island of Moloka'i in the state of Hawai'i presents an interesting setting for intercultural educational research in that it is a small rural community of 6,500 residents, with a relatively unique ethnic makeup: 59% Native Hawaiian, 23% Filipino-American, 9% European-American, and 7% Japanese-American. Despite recent improvement efforts, the Moloka'i schools continue to experience increasing numbers of special services referrals (Kaunakakai School, 1994). This increase is due in part to increased behavioral referrals, which although have been attributed to defiance, may in fact be a culturally based conflict of values. Low standardized achievement test scores also tend to be a problem in Moloka'i schools.

Culturally Compatible Education

One line educational research has focused on is the process of teaching and learning in cultures whose students have difficulty in school, with the goal of designing "culturally compatible" education (e.g., Jordan & Tharp, 1979; Tharp, 1989; Yamauchi & Tharp, 1995). This body of research indicates that changing the structure of the classroom interactions and activities, so that they are more compatible with the home cultures of these children, promotes classroom learning (Deyhle, 1983; Jordan, 1985; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Stearns, 1986; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994; Yamauchi, 1994). In essence, these researchers attempt to bridge the gap between experience with informal learning in natal cultures and the formal school learning that dominates western classrooms. This is accomplished by innovations in the structure and content of classroom interactions, with much more relevance to the children's background experiences. The first step

in culturally compatible educational research involves a comparison of the values of the specific school site with those of the community it serves (Jordan, 1985).

The Study of Values

One of the goals of our research has been to clearly characterize the presence of particular values within the Moloka'i community, that is, where they come from, how they are understood by various groups within the community, and how values are operationalized in multiple sociocultural contexts through observable behavior. Cultural values are modeled and experienced through shared processes of socialization. The use of the word "culture" reflects Goodenough's (1971) definition gave it: a set of norms of behavior in the minds of individuals who share much of the content of those norms, including the organization of world experiences, their belief system, and a general taxonomic cognitive system shared with members of the same group. Berry et al. (1992) argue that education plays a significant role in socialization and cultural transmission and children, as products of such a system, become enculturated through it. Trueba et al. (1990) refer to educators as "the key agents of socialization of culturally-different children" (p. 2).

But the process of enculturation involves not only the school; Parents, other adults, and peers are part of a network of influences on the child, which interact to shape the developing person (Berry et al., 1992, Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). In an effort to establish a baseline of cultural values against which future intergenerational and interethnic comparisons can be made, this study focused on collecting stories, beliefs, and observations about education from Moloka'i community members.

Method

Participants

Participants included 30 members of the Moloka'i community recruited through contacts in the schools and larger community. Of the 30 participants, 12 were Native Hawaiian and 18 were from other ethnic groups, including Japanese-American (n=8), Filipino-American (n=3), European-American (n=4), Chinese-American (n=2), and one participant who considered himself "Euro-Asian." Participants' ages ranged from 20- to 81-years-old, with a median age of 56.5 years-old.

Within the Hawaiian group, only two of the participants were educators (two others also worked at school sites, one as a custodian and the other as a school secretary). The two Hawaiian educators were also the only ones in that group with a college education. Within the non-Hawaiian group, 12 of the 18 participants were educators. The majority of the non-Hawaiians were college educated (n=13). All of the Hawaiian participants grew up in Hawai'i, and 10 of them were raised on Moloka'i. Of the non-Hawaiian group, 13 of the 18 grew up in Hawai'i, and 8 of these on island of Moloka'i.

Procedure

As part of a larger study, researchers conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with 26 of the participants (see Appendix for interview questions). For four of the participants (two married couples), interviews were conducted in pairs. Depending on the participants' schedules, interviews varied in length: most interviews were 1-2 hours long. Interviews were recorded on video and audio tape.

The interviews were transcribed, and a content analysis of the data was conducted on the transcriptions. For each interview, the utterances were coded using seven large categories, a) utterances about personal values, b) utterances about observed values of others, and c) utterances about the cultural compatibility of schooling, d) utterances about specifically Hawaiian aspects of the community or schools, e) utterances about the success and failure of teachers, and f) utterances about the lifestyle on the island. The categories were then further coded into sub-categories, such as personal values about education and observed values of others regarding community cohesiveness. Some utterances were coded into more than one category.

Using qualitative data analysis software, questions were asked of the coded interview data that compared participants' responses across demographic variables. For example, Hawaiian participants' responses were compared to those who were from other ethnic groups, and educators' comments were compared to those of non-educators.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the interview data indicates the possible existence of three cultural spheres, somewhat distinct from one another. At the broadest and most common level, there is the culture of the local Moloka'i community. One of the few things that all participants agreed with was the way they characterized life on the island, the kind of lifestyle that they shared. The island of Moloka'i is nicknamed "the friendly isle." Participants agreed that indeed Moloka'i is a place where people

are friendly and welcoming to their neighbors. As one Hawaiian participant suggested,

> *... everybody knows everybody...and everybody waves at everybody. And they know if you have visitors...'cause they see somebody else driving your car or something like that and then, you know, next day you see them, "Eh, somebody was over, eh? (N. S.)*

On an island with only two supermarkets (on the same street) and five restaurants, people are bound to run into each other. One educator said that although he didn't participate in that many community-wide activities, he inevitably came across many isle residents all the time:

> *It's real nice to walk down the street, you go to the market...you see friends....Especially in the school system... you know a lot of the kids and see them growing up. (B. B.)*

This larger sphere of the more general Moloka'i culture was also characterized by participants as more relaxed and slower paced. As one participant noted,

> *I think people who live here...like the slow pace...that easy going lifestyle where they [can] go fishing and hunting. I think the island has changed, but very little....That slow lifestyle over here is still the same 'cause we...still don't have traffic lights and all that kind of stuff (N. S.)*

Participants suggested that it may be the slow, relaxed pace and isolation from the city that draws certain kinds of people to their island, and that the friendliness and warmth of the community is what brings them back:

It's...like you're always welcome. You can go away, stay ten years, five years, whatever....[And when you go back] they say, "It's nice to see you. Come over! It's...like you're still a part of Moloka'i even though you're not living...there [anymore]. (A. R.)

We feel that these descriptions of the culture of Moloka'i represent life on the surface--life in a shared community where all residents take part as they shop, go to the beach, and walk around the town. Below this level, however, there appear to be many other sub-cultures that differ from each other. Two, in particular, were discussed by our informants in this study--the culture of the school community and a more Hawaiian home culture.

The Values and Value of School

Some participants characterized school values as individualistic and competitive, with an emphasis on respecting authority. At least one educator noted that the individualistic nature of schools on the island may be somewhat mediated by the more cooperative student population it serves. When participants were asked to discuss the values they felt were most important in their life, 50% (n=6) of the Hawaiians and 44% (n=8) of the participants from other ethnic groups specifically mentioned education as a personal value. When most of the participants talked about why education was important to them, they tended to mention that education leads to better jobs. And for many participants, like the following Filipino-American man we interviewed, a better job means a better life:

Today if you don't have an education, you don't have a diploma, [you're going to miss] that job opening that's coming....You gotta get

university...credit...no matter how smart you are....Education to me is important [for] all children. That's their life to lead them to a good job...to their future. (A. M.)

A Hawaiian Home Culture

The other cultural sphere that we identified was a more "Hawaiian" home culture. Although the Hawaiians we interviewed represented a diverse mix of perspectives regarding different personal values (e.g., the importance of school, of community, of respecting others, of religion, and of taking care of the land), the most common thread among them was an emphasis on the "ohana" or family. Fifty percent of the Hawaiian participants mentioned family as an important value, as did 33% of those from other ethnic groups. However, a closer look at what people said about valuing their family indicated some differences in the way Hawaiians talked about family, compared to the way non-Hawaiians did. Consistent with the literature on the differences between individualist and collectivist attitudes toward self-ingroup (Triandis, Botempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988), the Hawaiians tended to define their "family" so as to include extended family members; whereas, the non-Hawaiians tended to talk about their "family" in a more nuclear sense. For example, an 81-year-old Hawaiian woman commented,

I like to have them all around me. I always teach my children, my grandchildren, my great grandchildren the importance of having the family together. Sometimes my mo'opuna [grandchildren] stay fighting out there and I...say, "remember this is your brother or this is your cousin. What are

you guys fighting for? Just one dinky little marble....family is important you guys." (K. L.)

Hawaiian participants noted the importance of extended family members supporting each other and staying together.

Perceived Incompatibility of Home and School

We asked participants to consider the reasons why certain students on the island do not do well in school. Interestingly, none of our interviewees directed the cause of student failure in school to the institution itself. People from our sample seemed to believed that it is the parents and the families that need to make adjustments in order for children to function more productively within the school system, rather than the school needing to better serve the community. One community member commented that

a school is not out there to make you fail...you have support from education and, you know, half of the time you're going to live at home, so actually the family unit really is responsible for your education and learning. (E. S.)

The school, then, by default is the other "half" of a student's time, however in general, our participants did not discuss the institution's responsibilities or accountability to the community it serves. A member of the school community believed that "school represents all the values of society, [so] when a parent does not respect those same values, the parent has a problem" (R. B.). Here again, the burden of responsibility is deferred to the parents. It is not the fault of the school if a parent or family does not ascribe to the same

values as the institution. It is up to the parents to conform to the ways of the school.

These findings were somewhat unexpected. From what we knew of the traditional, western style school structure and the outstanding values of the Moloka'i community (primarily ohana and relationships with family), it seemed that the two would be relatively incompatible. The school emphasizes individual achievement, whereas the community emphasizes sharing and group mobility. That the school is seen as representative of the community values is not a consistent assumption, especially given the amount of attention given by interviewees to the decline of parent participation in the schools.

There is one exception to the general tendency to blame the home rather than the school for student disparity. Although there is, again, an absence of direct criticism of the school, several participants mentioned the cultural incompatibility between the students of Moloka'i and the teachers who come to the island from the mainland. Given the above idea that the school is representative of the values of the community, this is not surprising. After all, the teachers who are coming to Moloka'i from the mainland are coming from a decidedly different culture. A teacher from the midwest or the east coast is not likely to reflect the Hawaiian values prevalent in the Moloka'i community. A former principal recalled that a mainland "teacher just wouldn't relate to some of the kids. They couldn't understand

the language...they couldn't understand the culture" (C.C.). Another member of the school community reflected that

> *all the people on the staff are [not] aware of what is happening in the community. There are too many people on the staff that haven't been [on Moloka'i] long enough and will probably not stay long enough for them to develop any kind of appreciation for the Moloka'i community. (Y. L.)*

Because the new teachers from the mainland do not understand the values of the community, they are often unable to relate to the students. This perception parallels the belief that it is the parents, rather than the school, that need to conform. Here it is the new teachers that need to be acculturated to the school, and therefore to the larger, broader community value system. It is assumed, by the students and the community, that the teachers coming to Moloka'i from the mainland will not understand local culture upon arrival. One man expressed that he "feel[s] sorry for them [the mainland teachers] because they don't know what they get themselves into because of how the local culture is." (A. R.) This expressed empathy, however, does not translate into support for the incoming teachers. In fact, the opposite reaction can be observed in both the students and the local school community.

In an informal conversation with a well respected and long time local teacher, we became aware of just how low the expectations for the incoming mainland teachers are. This teacher described the annual "pool" set up by the local staff that gave odds as to which of the new teachers would last through the school

year and which would be on a plane home before the end of the first semester. Although most local faculty are quick to claim that they do everything within their ability to help the mainland teachers adjust, they are really not expecting most of them to last. This attitude does not go unnoticed by the new teachers. In interviews with first year teachers on Moloka'i, who were originally from the mainland, a recurring comment was that the local staff was not supportive and sometimes contradictory of the new teachers efforts. The local students are also less than cooperative until the new teacher can prove that he or she is committed to remaining on Moloka'i. Mainland teachers tell "horror stories" involving personal property damage and physical confrontations, and this is more typical of those who have recently arrived on Moloka'i shores.

Observed Ethnic Differences Regarding Education.

Of the all participants, 57% said that they thought that there were ethnic differences regarding the value of education. This perspective was voiced by a mix of the community--both educators and non-educators, people from all ethnic groups, and those with and without a college education.

Asians, and the Japanese-Americans in particular, were pointed out as valuing education and emphasizing this with their children. Japanese-American and Filipino (both Filipino national and Filipino-American) parents on the island were portrayed as pushing their children to achieve in school. One Japanese-American educator who had sent her sons to Oahu to attend a prestigious private school commented,

To this day, I see among the Japanese the value of education. They send their kids away to the mainland. They stress even going beyond getting their Master's. That is still here. I see that....Now, the other groups,...I have to say that the Japanese people are an endangered species. (Y. M.)

All of the remarks that suggested a less positive orientation toward school values referred to Hawaiians on the island. Although more non-Hawaiians than Hawaiians made these remarks, a few Hawaiians also acknowledged this association. One of the Japanese-American educators talked about his son's being half Hawaiian and half Japanese-American:

You know, he's part of the Hawaiian community but as a Japanese, you know, you're different. You have different values....If you are Hawaiian, you never put yourself above another Hawaiian. When he went to the high school...you know, he didn't wanna be the smartest kid in school, and these kind of things....He will always say he's not Hawaiian. He seen the Hawaiian, he's seen that they dumb. They stick around the bathrooms and so on. The only time started to say he wasn't Hawaiian was his senior year. Then, you know, it's a conflict because he's Japanese, Chinese, and you know, Hawaiian. He says "I look at the Hawaiians over here. They really stupid. I mean, look at how their homes and things like that." You know, he wasn't proud at all. But then he wanted to elevate himself. (C. C.)

Conclusion

One way to understand our participants' diverse, and sometimes contradictory, observations of their own values and those of others is to look at their relationships--culturally and socially--as existing within multi-layered but also interacting spheres. In an island-wide sense, Moloka'i is a unique and somewhat homogenous community sharing many values; but those general lifestyle values don't ostensibly include education. That is, the community often interacts with and evaluates each other using criteria that do not include education as a marker of success or failure. At the same time, the failure of new teachers is often attributed to their inability to acquire or adhere to more general, island-wide norms.

If the Hawaiian community values the support and close proximity of extended family members, there is an inherent tension between this value and the school's goal of sending youth off to college and away from the island. This is especially notable given the scarcity of jobs on Moloka'i, so that the opportunities to return are more difficult. What it means, then, to be a "good" member of a Hawaiian ohana may not necessarily comply with what "good students" end up doing. The notion that schooling threatens one's identity as a Hawaiian has helped us to understand that when community members complain that students "nowadays" are disrespectful of their teachers, it may be that students are finding a way to resist contradictory values in school to reinforce who they are. In the past, Hawaiian students may have appeared to be more respecting of educators, but this may also have

been an indication of more passive, less resistant responses to what was uncomfortable or inappropriate.

There exists a segment of the Moloka'i community, largely culturally Hawaiian, that at least tacitly encourages a lifestyle that doesn't rely on education as a stepping stone to something else. As one Hawaiian community leader said,

> *If education leads to jobs and jobs leads to money, I think the Japanese and the Filipinos really buy into that. That makes a lot of sense and therefore you should do it. [For] Hawaiians, money is not really the value. So, it's not a big deal, getting a job. More is the quality of your life, the happiness, togetherness, those things are more valuable. So I think that's basically the differences. (R. W.).*

This validates an alternative for Hawaiian students to posit an identity that differentiates them from mainstream cultural values.

The interpretation of Hawaiian children's defiance in school as a resistance to threats against their identity is reinforced by some of our participants' observations that students in the newly instituted Hawaiian Immersion Program are more respectful of their teachers. It may be that a Hawaiian Immersion program would not be as much at odds with one's identity as a Hawaiian community member. The program, at least on one level (of language) conveys the importance of returning to something that is more traditionally Hawaiian, even in school.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What is your name? Would you spell it?
2. Do you mind sharing your age with us?
3. What do you consider to be your primary ethnicity?
4. What is your current or past occupation?
5. How far did you go in school? (What is your highest level of education, degrees if any?)
6. Are you married and do you have any children?
7. How long have you lived on Moloka'i? (If you lived somewhere else, where was it, and for how long?)
8. Did you attend school on Moloka'i? Which years?
9. How have things changed on Moloka'i since you were younger? Can you give some specific examples of similarities or differences as you remember it?
10. How have the schools on Moloka'i changed since you were younger?
11. Do you feel that Moloka'i is a community where generally everyone knows everyone else?
12. If so, how does this affect how people on this island behave?
13. Has this changed over the years that you have been living on Moloka'i?
14. Does Moloka'i have any social problems that you can identify?
15. Have those problems changed over the years that you have lived on Moloka'i?

16. How do you feel about some peoples' interests in developing tourism on Moloka'i?
17. What is different or similar about school and education now than when you were younger? Can you give some specific examples?
18. How important is education in people's lives today?
19. Do you notice any differences in educational attitudes or beliefs across ethnic lines?
20. What changes would you make in the education system or in the content of a school's curriculum to better serve the population on Moloka'i?
21. Are the values of the school compatible with the values of the home? What are the values of the school and the home?
22. Are the values that you were brought up with different than the values you see kids with today?
23. How did you learn your values?
24. What are the roles of the school and the family in teaching kids values?
25. What do you feel are the most important values in your life?
26. Are school personnel aware of community values, and is this reflected in the administration and teaching at the school?
27. How strong is the presence of Hawaiian values on Moloka'i?
28. Has the sovereignty movement affected this? If so, how?
29. Have you noticed any tensions between the school and other parts of the community?

30. How is life different for you now than you thought it would be when you were an adolescent?